

**Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, April 19, 1809,
from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve
Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul
Leicester Ford.**

TO JAMES MADISON J. MSS.

Monticello, April 19, 1809.

Dear Sir, —I have to acknowledge your favor of the 9th, and to thank you for the political information it contained. Reading the newspapers but little and that little but as the romance of the day, a word of truth now and then comes like the drop of water on the tongue of Dives. If the British ministry are changing their policy towards us, it is because their nation, or rather the city of London, which is the nation to them, is shaken as usual, by the late reverses in Spain. I have for some time been persuaded that the government of England was systematically decided to claim a dominion of the sea, and to levy contributions on all nations, by their licenses to navigate, in order to maintain that dominion to which their own resources are inadequate. The mobs of their cities are unprincipled enough to support this policy in prosperous times, but change with the tide of fortune, and the ministers, to keep their places, change with them. I wish Mr. Oakley may not embarrass you with his conditions of revoking the orders of council. Enough of the nonimportation law should be reserved, 1st, to pinch them into a relinquishment of impressments, and 2d, to support those manufacturing establishments which their orders, and our interests, forced us to make.

I suppose the conquest of Spain will soon force a delicate question on you as to the Floridas and Cuba, which will offer themselves to you. Napoleon will certainly give his consent without difficulty to our receiving the Floridas, and with some difficulty possibly

Library of Congress

Cuba. And though he will disregard the obligation whenever he thinks he can break it with success, yet it has a great effect on the opinion of our people and the world to have the moral right on our side, of his agreement as well as that of the people of those countries.

Mr. Hackley's affair is really unfortunate. He has been driven into this arrangement by his distresses, which are great. He is a perfectly honest man, as is well known here where he was born, but unaccustomed to political subjects, he has not seen it in that view. But a respect for the innocence of his views cannot authorize the sanction of government to such an example. * * *